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Visibility Secured, Authenticity Endangered

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Visibility Secured, Authenticity Endangered

Timothy VanWingerden

William Deresiewicz, author of the article, “The End of Solitude”, begins with the perception that the view of self has recently shifted (1). He asserts the notion that in the postmodern age, the desire of the contemporary self is visibility. Visibility is most easily established when one validates his or herself by becoming known to others through the broad medium of technology. The contemporary self wants to be known, and sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and other technological means like texting, have become a way of achieving that notoriety. However, visibility cannot be attained without a cost; a sacrifice must be made in one’s life in order to satisfy this unquenchable thirst. Deresiewicz claims that this sacrifice is solitude. Solitude is no longer being held in high regard and it is actually disappearing from one’s life (2). As solitude diminishes from one’s life, the contemporary self feeds on the acceptance brought from technology, causing the value of self to get lost in the cyber sea of anonymity, while the image of self is exaggerated to appease the want of becoming known.

Deresiewicz argues that society’s recent neglect on being alone is a serious problem because throughout history one can observe the importance and value of solitude (4-7). First, he uses the example of religious solitude and how it was used to improve a relationship with God, claiming that it has been “understood as an essential dimension of religious experience” (5). Secondly, he unfolds the perspective of solitude from the literary movement of Romanticism, arguing that solitude achieved its greatest cultural salience observing the historical figures of the Renaissance (6). Lastly, as the Modernist worldview began to immerse society, solitude began to appear harsher as it held the notion that the only essential relationship is with oneself (7).

Deresiewicz argues that solitude was abandoned partly due to the fear of being alone (9). The fear of loneliness emerged as

suburbanization began to increase, and that fear was dispelled with the arrival of the internet. While the world became more isolated, the internet emerged, providing a means to stay in touch. Although he makes it clear that the internet in and of itself is not a bad thing, he argues that it is actually too much of a good thing (10). The more one is on social networking sites, the more they will become known, and the less they will know themselves. Another compelling point that he argues, is that in today's culture loneliness and solitude have been viewed synonymously, which causes society to view solitude in a very negative context. Hence, the younger generation not only has no desire for solitude, but some do not even know what it is.

Deresiewicz argues that without solitude one loses a propensity for introspection, the act of examining one's own mental and emotional processes, which leads to a deficient attention span. The lack of sustained reading can be observed as a by-product of this, as Deresiewicz argues, and reading becomes redefined as skipping and skimming (16). He digs deeper and argues that society no longer believes in a solitary mind (17). In postmodernist thinking, communicating one's sense of self is mediated graphically and performatively instead of verbally, narratively, and analytically which causes the young generation to treat their value of self carelessly, losing the authenticity and uniqueness of one's self. Finally, Deresiewicz exposes the importance of solitude in the person, denoting that it enables one to not only secure the integrity of self, but also explore it (19). "We are not merely social beings. We are each also separate, each solitary...each miraculously our unique selves and mysteriously enclosed in that selfhood" (19). He states that although solitude can appear impolite, it is essential for the development of the self. In fact, solitude is even worth the sacrifice of a few relationships, since after all, solitude ultimately reflects the relationship of oneself.

Deresiewicz does an effective job establishing the value of solitude and demonstrating its neglect in our postmodern culture. He structured his paper with strong examples, allowing the reader to visualize the issues of solitude, while keeping the paper logically sound using historical data as his backbone. He persuades his reader using a balance of ethos, pathos, and logos and structures it in that order. While there is not a clear defining line, it can be observed that his intentions were to first establish a trust with the reader, then

relate to the reader, and finally make logical conclusions to persuade and ultimately convince the reader.

Saturated with over fifty references to historical figures and works of literature, ethos quickly rises to the surface of this article displaying the vast knowledge of Deresiewicz. This establishes his credibility and supplies his argument with historical depth, improving the article's significance. An example of this can be seen in paragraph nine when he is examining how modernism has effected solitude. He lists thirteen different historical figures to complement his argument. It appears that Deresiewicz chooses an interesting tactic for presenting his references. A majority of his references are listed without much of an explanation, which seems to imply that he expects the reader to be familiar with these historical figures and works of literature. However, I believe that this is not the case. Deresiewicz did this for two reasons: First, he is observing solitude in history, so he can be brief because an explanation will distract the reader from his thesis. Second, he used these references as a way to encourage the reader to take the time to read about these prominent figures on their own. Not only do these historical references supply Deresiewicz with credibility, but they also are sufficient as backing for his claim.

One of the most effective ways that Deresiewicz uses to demonstrate the neglect on solitude is his ability to move from deep concentrated thinking, to dramatic imagery. These strategically placed pathos arguments not only keep the argument applicable but also refrain the paper from sounding too scholarly and factual, intimidating the attention-deficient reader. For example, after Deresiewicz unfolds the historical background of solitude, he shifts towards the 70s and 80s and paints a picture of a dark world where corruption is increasing and morality is declining, captivating the reader's attention (9). Deresiewicz not only captures his reader's emotions, but he also paves the way for his qualifier in the following paragraph. His article now turns to a positive light: "Under those circumstances the internet arrived as an incalculable blessing" (10). Deresiewicz clearly states that the internet in and of itself is not bad, but the problem is how it is being used (10). After a limit of solitude has been enforced, he drives his point home when he rants a few rhetorical questions and states that visibility stemmed from technology is superficial, "Visibility secures our self-esteem,

becoming a substitute, twice removed, for genuine connection” (10). This is where Deresiewicz attacks the root of problem with the internet and social media. After he admits the internet is good, he turns around and accuses it for deteriorating one’s view of self, claiming that it is impossible to be alone (10). This last statement, although a logical fallacy, really enables the reader to reflect on what they just read. He also adds another limit to his claim at the end of his article when he states that solitude is not for everyone (21). Solitude takes work, and one must pursue solitude in order to experience its full potential.

Deresiewicz did a fantastic job connecting with his readers through his use of contrast. This writing pattern served in his favor to relate to the reader, and allowed the reader to be persuaded even more. His comparison of loneliness and boredom allowed the reader to visualize what it means to be terrified of being lonely and it brought the article to a more personal level, unfolding the view of solitude from a new perspective. This perspective also signifies to the reader that there are a lot of dimensions to this argument that must be studied.

Deresiewicz effectively draws conclusions about what has been lost with the neglect of solitude with his use of logos. After establishing good credibility and connecting with the reader emotionally, he begins to use logos by incorporating variety of quotes and logical statements that add to the complexity of the issues at hand. He makes a lot of strategically placed logos statements, further persuading the reader to conform to his way of thinking. Although logos is present with the historical summary of solitude, Deresiewicz does not utilize all aspects of it until he has his readers convinced and emotionally attached. Paragraph sixteen and seventeen are great examples of a strong logos argument that Deresiewicz uses. With logical reasoning, he structures what has been lost from the neglect of solitude, and further concludes that we no longer believe in a solitary mind. Also, by quoting Theoreau he backs his explanation with supporting evidence. Deresiewicz is very organized in the way he laid out his argument. First, he established credibility by the way he looked back at solitude on history, second he related to the reader by describing his own experience with boredom, comparing it to loneliness and solitude, and finally he told the reader what has happened now that solitude is lost. This structure clearly uses ethos, pathos, and logos to persuade the reader and it was done effectively.